DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 166 664 CS 004 658

AUTHOR Horodezky, Betty
TITLE Family Forces for Preschool Development of Health, Vocabulary and Perceptual Skills.
PUB DATE 78
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Reading Association World Congress on Reading (7th, Hamburg, West Germany, August 1-3, 1978)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 Plus Postage. HC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *Cognitive Development; Disadvantaged Environment; Educational History; Family Environment; *Family Influence; Health; Language Development; Nutrition; *Parent Child Relationship; *Prereading Experience; *Preschool Children; Preschool Education; Reading Readiness; Research; *Skill Development

ABSTRACT

The importance of parental attention in the facilitation of prereading skill development is examined in this paper. The first section presents a historical perspective on attitudes toward early childhood education, touching on the views of educators of past centuries and on recent trends in early childhood education in the United States. The following section, which delineates the influence of health on preschool learning, summarizes studies on the effects of maternal malnutrition upon development and on the relationship between early nutrition, brain development, and mental ability. The third section discusses the linguistic development of preschool children, the effects of adult/child interaction on language development, and the importance of providing opportunities for developing auditory, visual, and perceptual skills. The final section summarizes research results that suggest the importance of home environment in prereading development and identifies characteristics of the homes of deprived children. (GT)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED166664

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

Seventh World Congress on Reading
Hamburg, Germany
1978

Family Forces for Preschool Development of Health, Vocabulary and Perceptual Skills

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Betty Horodezky
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

© Copyright

C 500v 658

Betty Horodezky
Elementary Education
University of British Columbia
Vancouver, B.C., Canada
July 12, 1978

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

It seems ironic that man, despite his intellectual prowess and esteemed place in the hierarchy of the animal kingdom, has found that his greatest challenge remains not in conquering space, nor perfecting technology, but in providing for the optimum educational needs of his young.

It cannot be said that this challenge has gone unnoticed, nor can we lay claim to the concept of early education or readiness as a recent innovation. An historical perspective will reveal that for centuries educators have sought to expand their knowledge of preschool experiences which foster learning. [1]

As early as 1657, Comenius proposed that a Mother's School be established in every home for every child during the first six years of life; perhaps even more impressive was his proposal that prenatal education be provided for mothers. [17]

Later, writings by Rousseau, in 1762, showed further progress toward the concept of readiness and early education. This was exemplified in his book Emile, where he underscored the need for providing for education through a series of development stages from birth through early adulthood. [17]

Early in the nineteenth century, Froebel's writings, influenced by those of Rousseau and Pestalozzi, also stressed a strong need for reform in educating the young. His ideas on the educational value of play were to be later reflected in the practices of the first kindergartens in Europe and the United States.

These are but a few of the well known educators from our

historic past who sought to improve the educational environment for the vast numbers of children of the poor in Europe. In their writings, one can see the first appearance of the concepts of preschool education, readiness and family involvement--not too unlike our present day educational theories.

In America, the concerns for changes in early education were not felt until the Sputnik era of the 1950's and 1960's. At this time, it was found that large numbers of preschool children from impoverished homes were seriously lacking in the fundamental educational experiences needed for cognitive growth and success in school.

Leading theorists including Hunt, Bruner and Bloom were espousing the importance of the child's early environment, and addressing attention to the "crucial" first five years of intellectual development.

In a concerted effort to stem public criticism of the excess failure rate in schools, and to answer the need for equal educational opportunities for all segments of the population, federally funded programs such as the "Head Start" program were launched.[17] The rapid expansion of these programs since the sixties has enjoyed continued support over the past two decades.

Although reported research findings of their success have been inconclusive, it is encouraging to note that studies such as the Willmon [33] investigation of parent participation in "Head Start" programs, the Brzeinski [2] Denver experiment and research by Durkin [11] have all reflected the potential of an active liason between the school and home in better preparing

preschool children for the task of getting ready to read.

The thesis of this paper thus lies not in the question of should parents help their children, but in why parents should help their children in a "home start" effort geared toward fostering growth in prereading skills.

INFLUENCE OF HEALTH ON PRESCHOOL LEARNING

If a child is to be expected to grow and learn to his maximum ability, he must possess good health and a stimulating environment. Both mental and physical growth are dependent upon the kind of nutrition, environment and physical hygiene the child receives during his growing years. [2]

The importance of the effect of maternal malnutrition upon the mental and physical impairment of the unborn child has received considerable attention to date.[23] However, equally as critical and perhaps less well understood by parents and educators, is the effect of severe malnutrition on the physical and mental development of the new born infant during the first few months of life. Research is now telling us that if an infant is deprived of proper nutrition or stimulation during the first few years of life, there is a good likelihood that he will never reach his fullest physical and mental capacity. [18]

In a summary of studies on the effect of malnutrition on development by Cravioto [5], it was found..."that the existence of an association between protein calorie malnutrition in infancy and retardation in mental development has been established beyond

reasonable doubt."[5] Also, the mental lag incurred by severe malnutrition during the very early months in the infant's life may produce lasting consequences.

Similarly, Dobbing and Sands[9], study on the effect of nutrition on brain development revealed that the most important growth spurt in brain development takes place after birth and not before birth as previously assumed, and continues rapid development for at least two years. The subsequent effect of inadequate nutrition and lack of stimulation during this critical time could inflict permanent damage.[18]

Eikenwald and Fry[13], suggest that starvation during the first six months of life is more likely to have profound and permanent effect upon the physical, intellectual and emotional development of the individual, than starvation after the second year of life.[13]

In answer to the question, can severe malnutrition inflected during the first few months of life be reversed? Monckeberg [21] provided extended treatment for fourteen infants afflicted with severe malnutrition during the first few months of life. Results of his research showed that at three to six years of age, most of the children were within normal weight, were generally short for their age and had an average IQ of 62--significantly below normal! Monckeberg concluded that the effect of early severe malnutrition during the critical period of brain development is irreversible.

Although more definitive evidence is still needed in the relationship between early nutrition, brain development, and mental ability, we do know that adequate nutrition is of prime

importance to the preschool child if he is to function as an alert and responsive learner. Since the process of learning to read begins essentially from the moment of conception rather than from the moment of entering school, and because reading involves the total growth of the child, it is imperative that parents and educators understand the implications of nutrition in providing for pre and post natal care of the young.

PRESCHOOL DEVELOPMENT-VOCABULARY AND PERCEPTUAL SKILLS

One of the unique characteristics of man is his "gift" of language.[7] From the prelinguistic birth utterance to mature spoken language, verbal development takes on a sequential pattern; only under conditions of environmental or intellectual deprivation does this pattern vary.[17]

Before entering school, the preschool child has already attained extensive practice in linguistic development from his home and community environment. Within approximately six years of listening to language, and five years of his own verbalization, the child makes significant progress toward mastering the stuctural patterns of his language. At no other time will he accomplish such dramatic growth in language development as during these preschool years.[7]

Since language is learned long before the child comes to school, the richness of his vocabulary and language facility will be largely determined by the interest, attention and communicative adult interaction he receives from his home--Parent and sibling responses to the child's vocal expressions are also an essential component to the child's early language development.[8] The

family not only provides the language model, but the kind of language the child will ultimately imitate. [25]

Cazden [4] found that children could make language gains if they were given an opportunity to interact with responsive adults. Smith [28] writes that the speaking vocabularies of children from environments where speaking was not encouraged had vocabularies of as few as 500 words, while children from environments where verbal language was encouraged had vocabularies of approximately 2,500 words--a significant difference!

The development of auditory and visual discrimination for prereading skills is also of major importance. Studies by Harrington and Durrell [15] , and Nicholson [24] concur that factors of auditory and visual discrimination are of greater importance to reading readiness and reading achievement than mental age.

It is therefore necessary that in preparing the child for the task of getting ready to read, that opportunities be provided for developing prerequisite skills of: 1) being able to understand the multiple meanings of words; 2) being able to use language effectively; 3) having the necessary experiences and concepts to bring to the language; 4) being able to auditorily and visually discriminate likenesses and differences in printed symbols and words, and 5) having adequate perceptual motor skills of direction-ability--knowing left from right, up from down, and being able to turn pages, etc. [29]

Spache [30] contends that children with exceedingly poor language development, meagre vocabularies, poor articulation and lacking in communicative skills, will undoubtedly have difficulty with reading.

Since reading is a language process, [16] much of the child's success will depend upon what experiences he brings to the printed page, for..."involving children in direct experiences helps to build a rich experiential background that is essential not only for sustaining interest, but for building concepts, extending vocabulary and establishing the rich oral language base necessary for a successful beginning in reading."[26]

INFLUENCE OF HOME ENVIRONMENT

During the period of the 1930's and up until the 1960's, the school's attitude toward parent participation in teaching their children was generally one of "leave it to us"--it was preferred that parents not meddle in the "magic process" of teaching their children to read.[14]

In sharp contrast to this, the attitude which emerged over the 1960's and 1970's seemed to have come full circle [14] to the question of: "What can we do to involve family forces in the process of preparing young children for reading?"

Numerous authorities have recognized the importance of home environment on prereading development. In 1968, Durkin identified this necessity when she pointed out..."the urgent need is to help parents realize the important differences between a home that is intellectually stimulating and one that is intellectually smothering."[12]

Early studies by Brzeinski [2], Sheldon and Carrilo[27] and Sutton[3], reported a significant relationship between children's home prereading experiences and later success in beginning

reading.

More recent studies by Vukelich[32], Criscuolo[6] and Woods[34] have lent further support to the theory that knowledgeable parents can enhance their children's prereading skills.

Since reading takes on differing values within our societal structures, varying factors such as education, cultural interests, income and family stability all contribute to the quantity and quality of reading the child will experience in his first environment--the home.[30]

Miller[20], identified some of the characteristics of the homes of deprived children as: 1)lacking in physical stimulation necessary for vocabulary and concept development; 2)congested and of high noise level; 3)having sparse verbal communication between the preschool child and the parent; 4)parent use of imprecise vocabulary and, 5)having an inadequate home schedule.

The vast disparity between home environments which different children encounter in their early education is not to be overlooked. Numerous studies conducted in this area have concurred..."that social class greatly influences the kind of school performance the child will have."[19] However, one might well conjecture that educational poverty is not the possession only of the poor, for, neither luxury nor poverty are necessary and sufficient conditions for determining an atmosphere for learning to read--"it is what the child experiences in the home and neighborhood that makes the difference."[28]

In conclusion, research has shown that parents can, with proper guidance, make a valuable contribution toward their children's initial experiences in learning to read ..."if

educational research in early childhood education is to have a major impact, it must include the added dimension of the home... [3]"...for as Montagu so aptly stated..."the most enduring of all tragedies for the child and his society lies in the difference between what he was capable of becoming, and what he has in fact been caused to become..."[13]

REFERENCES

1. Brophy, Jere E.; Thomas, L. and Nedler, Shari E. Teaching in the Preschool New York; Harper and Row publishers. 1975

2. Brzeinski, Joseph E. "Beginning Reading in Denver" The Reading Teacher, 18 (1964), 16-21

3. Howard, Will. "Early Reading How Not When!" Reading Teacher, 25 (1971), 240

4. Cazden, C. "Environmental Assistance to the Child's Acquisition of Grammar" Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University, 1965

5. Cravioto, J. "Complexity of Factors Involved in "Protein-Calorie Malnutrition" In Malnutrition is a Problem of Ecology P. Gyorgy and O.L. Kline eds., Basel and New York: Karger 1970, p.7,12,22

6. Criscuolo, Nicholas P. "Parents: Active Partners in the Reading Program" Elementary English, 51 (1974), 883-84

7. Dallman, Martha, Rouch, Roger L., Char, Lynette Y.C., and DeBoer, John J. The Teaching of Reading New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston. 1978 p.19, 78, 25

8. Deverell, Alfred E. Teaching Children to Read and Write, Toronto: Holt, Rinehart and Winston of Canada, 1973 p.16-18

9. Dobbing, J. and Sands, J. "Timing of Neuroblast Multiplication in Developing Human Brain" Nature.(1970), 6-39

10. Downing, John and Thackray, Derek. Readiness. Toronto: Hodder and Stoughton, 1976

11. Durkin, Dolores "Early Readers-Reflections After Six Years of Research", The Reading Teacher, 18 (1964), 3-7

12. _____, "When Should Children Begin to Read," In Innovation and Change in Reading Instruction, NYSSE, Helen M. Robinson, ed., Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1968 p.70

13. Eichenwald, H.F. and P.C. Fry "Nutrition and Learning" Science 163 (1969), 644-648

14. Fry, Edward Elementary Reading Instruction. New York: McGraw, Hill Book Company, 1977 p.125

15. Harrington, Sister M.J., and Durrell, D.D. "Mental Maturity Versus Perception Abilities in Primary Reading". Journal of Educational Psychology. 46 (1955), 375-80

16. Heilman, Arthur W. Principles and Practices of Teaching Reading. Columbus: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Company, 1977

17. Leeper, Sarah Hammond, Dales, Ruth J., Skipper, Dora, Sykes, and Witherspoon, Ralph L. Good Schools for Young Children. New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., Inc. 1974 p.6-7 p.174-175

18. Lewin, Roger "Starved Brains" Psychology Today. September, (1975) 29-33

19. Miller, Wilma H. The First R: Elementary Reading Today. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1972 p. 13

20. _____ Elementary Reading Today. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1972 p. 41

21. Monckeberg, F. Mental Retardation from Malnutrition: 'Irreversible ..." Journal of the American Medical Association. 206 (1968), 30-31

22. Monroe, Marion and Rogers, Bernice. Foundations for Reading. Glenview: Scott, Foresman and Co. 1964. p. 172

23. Montagu, Ashley "Sociogenic Brain Damage" American Anthropoligist 74 (1972), 1051, 1045-1061

24. Nicholson, A. "Background Abilities Related To Reading Success in First Grade." Journal of Education. Boston University, (1958), 7-24

25. Petty, Walter T., Petty, Dorothy C., and Becking, Marjorie F. Experiences in Language Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc. 1973 p. 9

26. Schulwitz, Bonnie Smith "The Teacher Fostering Interest and Achievement" The Kindergarten Child and Reading. Lloyd O. Ollila ed., Delaware" International Reading Association, 1977. p.46

27. Sheldon, W. D. and Carrillo, L. W. "Relation of Parents, Home, and Certain Developmental Characteristics to Childrens Reading Ability," Elementary School Journal. (January, 1952), 262-270

28. Smith, Carl B. "The Effect of Environment on Learning to Read", Parents and Reading Carl B. Smith, ed., Delaware: International Reading Association, 1971. p. 13, 11

29. Smith, Richard J., and Johnson, Dale D. Teaching Children to Read. Don Mills, Ontario: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1976. p. 72

30. Spache, George D. and Spache, Evelyn B. Reading In the Elementary School. Boston: Allyn and Bacon Inc., 1977. p.158, 20

31. Sutton, Marjorie Hunt "Readiness for Reading at the Kindergarten Level" The Reading Teacher 22 (1964), 234-239

32. Vukelich, Carol "Parents Participation as a Factor in a Reading Readiness Program" Unpublished manuscript, University of Delaware, Newark, 1977

33. Willmon, B.J. "Reading Readiness as Influenced by Parent Participation in Head Start Programs" in Figurel J.A. ed., Reading and Realism Newark: International Reading Association 1969 (617-622)

34. Woods, Carol et. al., "The Effect of the Parent Involvement Program on Reading Readiness Scores" Mesa Public Schools, Mesa: Arizona, 1974.